

## Helping Children Cope With Loss...

The death of a loved one is always difficult. For children, the loss of a sibling, parent, relative, or friend can affect their sense of security. Helping children cope with their loss is crucial in enabling them to resume their lives more fully at home and school.

### Quick Tips for Parents

- Children need comforting and frequent reassurance that they're safe. Make sure they get it.
- Be honest and open about the death.
- Encourage children to express their feelings through talking, drawing, or playing.
- Try to maintain your daily routines as much as possible.
- Contact the MISS Foundation for support.

### How to explain "death" to children...

- Be gentle, but honest and direct
- Try not to associate death with sleeping
- Avoid telling children that God took their loved one. It may create feelings of anxiety or anger toward God. This may also be a good opportunity to open dialogue about your own spiritual beliefs.
- Allow and encourage children to be part of the rituals: funerals, candlelighting, memorial services
- Encourage questions and communication
- Consider a support group for grieving children



M.I.S.S. Foundation  
P.O. Box 5333  
Peoria, AZ 85385-5333

*Children are the forgotten grievers...*

## Helping Grieving Children



623-979-1000  
[www.misschildren.org](http://www.misschildren.org)

M . I . S . S .  
F O U N D A T I O N

## How Children Respond To Death...

Here are some common ways in which children may respond to a death:

- Sadness
- Denial, shock, and confusion
- Anger and irritability
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares or fear of sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Fear of being alone
- Somatic/physical complaints such as stomach aches and headaches
- Inability to concentrate or focus
- Guilt over failure to prevent the loss
- Depression or a loss of interest in daily activities
- Regressive behavior—acting much younger or reverting to earlier behaviors
- Withdrawal from friends
- Sharp drop in school performance
- Talking frequently and asking repeated questions about the death, or making repeated statements of wanting to join the deceased.
- Profound emotional reactions

## How to help a child grieve:

- Children are 'concrete' thinkers. Avoid expressions such as "passed on" or "went to sleep." Answer their questions about death simply and honestly. Only offer what they can absorb and don't overload them with information.
- Children are physical in their grief. Watch their bodies and support their play/behavior as their "language" of grief. Encourage art therapy as a healthy outlet for expression.
- Children can be fearful about death and the future. Give them a chance to discuss their fears and validate their feelings. Share happy memories about the person who died. Offer an alternate adult for talking and sharing since children are sometimes hesitant to express their true grief with their parents. Support groups specifically for children are also healthy outlets for expression.
- Children grieve as a part of a family. Children grieve the person and the "changed" behavior and environment of family and friends. Keep regular routines as much as possible. The golden rule of grief is not to make any major decision for the first 18 months.
- Children need to see the adults in their lives modeling a grieving process; acknowledging how one feels and talking about the loved one. Share an 'open emotion' policy and allow yourself to cry, wherever and whenever you feel the need to. Your openness validates their feelings.
- Children are repetitive in their grief. Respond patiently to their uncertainty and concerns. It can take a long time to recover from a loss. Expect their grief to revisit in cycles throughout their childhood or adolescence. A strong reminder, such as the anniversary of a death, may reawaken grief. Make yourself available to talk.

## Serious Concerns:

1. Extended periods of depression in which he or she loses interest in daily activities and events.
2. Inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone.
3. Acting much younger for extended period of time
4. Withdraws from friends at school.
5. Sharp drop in performance or refusal to attend school.

These are warning signs which indicate that professional intervention may be needed. Please seek a therapist who specializes in grief and trauma for children.

M . I . S . S .  
F O U N D A T I O N

**More than 120,000 children die every year in the United States. After the death of a child, families experience significant trauma and grief that can complicate and send ripples of grief through a community. The MISS Foundation is committed to helping families through local support groups, camps for grieving kids, free bilingual books and resources, indigent funeral funds and free funeral planning, free counseling, newsletters, web sites, and opportunities for volunteerism that allow people victimized by trauma, death and tragedy so that they can fully heal from the event.**

**Phone: 623-979-1000  
Web Site: [www.misschildren.org](http://www.misschildren.org)**